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Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

16 July 2015

Dear Senators,

IMPACT OF THE 2014 AND 2015 COMMONWEALTH BUDGET DECISIONS ON THE ARTS

Artsource is the peak membership body for visual artists in Western Australia. We have been operating since 1987 and have approximately 900 visual artists as members. As Chair of Artsource and as a practicing professional artist, I am writing to express great concern about the changes made to arrangements for arts funding contained in the Federal Budget.

We are deeply concerned about what is happening, particularly in respect of the cuts to The Australia Council for the Arts arising principally as a consequence of the creation of the National Program for Excellence in the Arts (NPEA) and the impact this will have on individual artists and small to medium-sized arts organisations.

We welcome the establishment of a Senate Inquiry.

Issues of main concern:

- This radical change to the arts funding process was introduced without full and proper consultation. Indeed, there was no consultation with the Australia Council for the Arts or any other key industry stakeholders. To exclude industry experience and expertise from the process was not merely disrespectful, but has clearly resulted in bad public policy with the potential to cause serious damage to the cultural landscape of our Nation.
- We understand that in addition to the \$28.2m cuts over four years made to the Australia Council's budget in 2014, the creation of the NPEA means an additional \$23m reduction in annual funds available to the Australia Council to deliver its grants programs for individual artists and key small to medium sized arts organisations. This puts an already fragile

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ecosystem in great peril. Emerging, small and independent projects, groups and artists are where excellence and innovation begin. To reduce significantly the funding available for these incubators will do untold damage. The immediate impacts on Australia Council funding include:

- Cancellation of the June 2015 grant round;
 - Suspension of the six-year funding program for organisations;
 - The removal of the ArtStart, Creative Communities Partnerships Initiative and Artists in Residence programs.
- Guidelines for the NPEA remain in draft form, but they describe a move away from the policy and widely internationally accepted principles of arms length arts funding and informed peer assessment. Clearly, this will not protect freedom of artistic expression and is wide open to political influence. Furthermore, what qualification does the Minister for the Arts have for making these decisions? How will diversity of quality arts and cultural experiences be maintained?
 - Draft guidelines for the NPEA explicitly exclude individual artists, the very people who create the “Excellence” in NPEA.
 - We fail to see how distributing grants via two bodies, both setting out to fund excellence in the arts, offers taxpayers value for money. There is clear duplication of effort, which is not only a waste of public money, but also will lead to greater bureaucracy and paperwork for all.
 - We do not support the cuts made to major national institutions, including the National Gallery of Australia and the National Portrait Gallery.
 - The enormous uncertainty that has been created by the announcement of the NPEA (draft guidelines have only just been published) and cuts to the Australia Council are threatening to undermine confidence in a sector that relies on partnerships and mixed funding streams to survive.
 - Cultivating greater private sector support for the arts through the work of Creative Partnerships Australia should not be resourced at the expense of existing effective government support mechanisms.

Artsource provides professional visual artists in Western Australia with practical and affordable services to support their practice and career development. We work hard with others to help create an environment where art is valued and artists can flourish. We are deeply concerned that the

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changes proposed in the Federal Budget will make things even harder for visual artists in WA, a state that has in the past not benefitted from federal arts funding to the proportion one would expect for the size of our population.

These serious concerns are, of course, not limited to the visual arts. The substantial negative impact of the changes introduced by the Federal Budget will be realised across the entire cultural landscape of our nation.

Artsource is joining with calls from many others for the funds cut from the Australia Council to be restored and the decision to establish the NPEA repealed.

Noting that “The National Programme for Excellence in the Arts will make funding available to a wider range of arts companies and arts practitioners”¹, we further propose that this is done by providing *additional* government money, rather than by channeling funds away from existing and effective government support mechanisms.

I am grateful to Senators for this opportunity to express our views.

Yours sincerely



Miik Green

Chair

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The Artists' Foundation of Western Australia

¹ <http://www.attorneygeneral.gov.au/Mediareleases/Pages/2015/SecondQuarter/12-May-2015-Attorney-General%27s-Portfolio-Budget-measures-2015-16.aspx>

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